



Write. Read. Feel. with Mychal Threets

Exploring Your Emotions on the Page

Facilitator Guide

Welcome, Facilitators, Librarians, and Educators!

Thank you for creating essential spaces for young people to come as they are, and to explore their feelings – and themselves – through writing. This guide supports facilitation of 826 National’s Watch and Write lesson, [Write. Read. Feel. with Mychal Threets](#), and includes ideas for welcoming all young people into the space, as well as suggested timing and activities to guide them through the writing prompt options in the lesson.

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About the Project

826 National is teaming up with acclaimed librarian Mychal Threets to invite young people across the country to write about their emotions, and to submit their writing for a chance to be published in 826 National’s next student anthology! All published authors will receive two copies of the publication, which will be released and distributed in June 2025.

Each year, 826 National collaborates with an author or other creative leader to share a writing prompt and publishing opportunity with students across the country. See past 826 National student anthologies below:

- [Let This Be Our Anthem](#) with *New York Times* bestselling author Javier Zamora
- [The Beast](#) inspired by a prompt from U.S. Poet Laureate Ada Limón
- [A Place Worth Being](#) with *New York Times* bestselling author Jason Reynolds
- [Poets in Revolt!](#) with Inaugural Poet Amanda Gorman

About 826 National

826 is the largest youth writing network in the country. 826 National serves as the hub of the movement to amplify student voices and champions the belief that strong writing skills are essential for academic and lifelong success.

The 826 Network now serves more than 710,000 students ages 6 to 18 in under-resourced communities each year online via 826 Digital and through chapters in nine cities: Boston, Chicago, Detroit/Ann Arbor/Ypsilanti, Los Angeles, New Orleans, New York City, San Francisco, Washington, D.C., and Minneapolis/St. Paul. 826 National was established in 2008 to support a growing network of writing centers founded by author Dave Eggers and educator Nínive Calegari in San Francisco in 2002.

We work toward a country in which the power and the joy of writing is accessible to every student in every classroom. Together, we believe writing is the key to cultivating a new generation of creative and diverse thinkers who will define a better, brighter, and more compassionate future.

About Mychal Threets

Mychal Threets is a librarian, literary ambassador, and the library's number one fan (according to himself, admittedly). He talks about mental health in hopes that it'll help others in their mental health journey. He is a recipient of the 2024 "I Love My Librarian" award from the American Library Association, is one of Library Journal's 2024 Movers & Shakers, and one of [TIME Magazine's 2024 Next Generation Leaders](#).

Session Overview

Writing is a space to come as you are. . .to show up as your authentic self, explore your identity, and process emotions. It's a space that invites you to tap into whatever you're feeling. To look inward and consider: how are you, really, today?

This session invites students to use writing to explore their feelings. It's all about reflecting on the power and possibility of emotions—the highs, the lows, and everything in between. This is an invitation for young people to explore those emotions through writing and to share what they're feeling inside on the page. There's no wrong way to do it – just be themselves.

All emotions are welcome here – joy, overwhelm, love, loneliness, etc. And, whatever they choose, writing about their emotions can be a powerful form of self-care. It's a way to honor where they're at, and it can even be a way to write their way forward.

Their mission is to write about their feelings, their way. It can be a poem, a reflection, a story – you name it. No matter what they write, we encourage them to bring their full selves to the writing process.

Find the full lesson introduction, including a Spanish translation, [here](#).

Time: We recommend at least 1-2 hours, depending on the number of young people you are working with, their ages, their familiarity with writing, and with each other.

Materials:

- Writing Prompt Handouts:
 - [Explore Your Feelings—Handout](#)
 - [Explore Your Feelings—Spanish Handout](#)
 - [What's Your Happy?—Handout](#)
 - [What's Your Happy?—Spanish Handout](#)

- Suggested books for read aloud (See Step 2: Read Mentor Texts [in the lesson](#) on 826 Digital)
- Pencils or other writing utensils
- General art supplies, like crayons, markers, or colored pencils
- Optional: Post-its (for check-in question)
- Optional: hand puppets or tactile supplies (any materials that may support your read aloud or session introduction)

Before You Start: For Those Working With Younger Children (Grades K-5)

At 826, our work is grounded in the core belief that **all young people are writers**; it is guided by the [826 Tenets](#): principles of writing instruction that undergird our approach to writing across 826 programs. This lesson, which invites young people to explore emotions through writing and reading, is connected to three 826 Tenets:

- **Culture of Creativity:** We create an environment where students are valued as creators and are encouraged to try new ideas and experiment with their work.
- **Student-Driven Pedagogy:** Through approaches such as project and inquiry-based learning, students have agency over their work as they are encouraged to explore their interests, ideas, and personal stories through writing.
- **Welcoming & Brave Space:** We provide a space students can call their own where they feel safe to reflect and brave to share their experiences. We strive to ensure that our programs and practices are inclusive and encourage learning from one another.

Because we're asking young people to be vulnerable in writing about their emotions, creating a welcoming and brave writing space is vital. To help build that environment, here are a few suggestions to consider:

- Find ways to make your physical space welcoming and inviting: snacks, music, puppets, two-minute dance parties, floor cushions. . . anything that encourages creativity! If you have storytime or program traditions that young people look forward to, we encourage you to incorporate those as time allows.
- Ground the writing with a discussion about sharing feelings with one another. Share with students that authors often use writing to process their emotions, and they'll have the chance to share their feelings today. Suggested discussion questions:
 - What does "feeling safe" mean to you?
 - What do we need to feel safe to share our feelings?
 - What ways do you share your feelings?
- Wherever possible, participate and write alongside young people. Not only does this model the writing process, but it also gives you the opportunity to pause and reflect on your own feelings.
- Encourage students to participate and write in whatever language is most comfortable to them. We welcome submissions in all languages. English translations are encouraged but not required for publication.

If you'd like to learn more about how 826 uses writing to create community, check out our Educator Tools, [Building Community Through Writing](#) and [How to Co-Create a Safe and Brave Space with Students](#).

Finally, before you begin, familiarize yourself with all of the prompt options and choose a mentor text from Mychal Threets' suggested book list (see the lesson: <https://826digital.com/resources/write-read-feel-with-mychal-threets>).

Determine whether you'll guide all of your writers through one prompt or provide a quick overview of each prompt and invite students to choose the one that interests them the most. For younger students, you might find it best to work through one prompt at a time, modeling ways to approach and complete each step as you go.

Before You Start: For Those Working With Middle Grades and Teens (Grades 6-12)

At 826, our work is grounded in the core belief that **all young people are writers**; it is guided by the [826 Tenets](#): principles of writing instruction that undergird our approach to writing across 826 programs. This lesson, which invites young people to explore emotions through writing and reading, is connected to three of 826 Tenets:

- **Culture of Creativity:** We create an environment where students are valued as creators and are encouraged to try new ideas and experiment with their work.
- **Student-Driven Pedagogy:** Through approaches such as project and inquiry-based learning, students have agency over their work as they are encouraged to explore their interests, ideas, and personal stories through writing.
- **Welcoming & Brave Space:** We provide a space students can call their own where they feel safe to reflect and brave to share their experiences. We strive to ensure that our programs and practices are inclusive and encourage learning from one another.

Because we're asking young people to be vulnerable in writing about their emotions, curating a welcoming and brave writing space is vital. To achieve that environment, here are a few suggestions for you to consider:

- Find ways to make your physical space welcoming and inviting: snacks, music, two-minute dance parties, sparkly gel pens, floor cushions. . . anything that encourages creativity!
- Ground the writing with a discussion about community guidelines. See the suggestions and questions in Step 1 of the Suggested Activities for ideas on how to build a welcoming and safe space for young writers
- Wherever possible, participate and write alongside young people. Not only does this model the writing process, but it also gives you the opportunity to pause and reflect on your own feelings.

- Encourage students to participate and write in their home language; we welcome submissions in all languages and English translations are encouraged but not required for publication.

Finally, before you begin, familiarize yourself with all of the prompt options and choose mentor text from Mychal Threets' suggested book list (see the lesson: <https://826digital.com/resources/write-read-feel-with-mychal-threets>).

Determine whether you'll guide all of your writers through one prompt or provide a quick overview of each prompt and invite students to choose the one that interests them the most.

To learn more about how 826 uses writing to create community, check out our Educator Tools, [Building Community Through Writing](#) and [How to Co-Create a Safe and Brave Space with Students](#).

Write. Read. Feel. with Mychal Threets: Writing Prompts

Facilitator Note:

Writing is a powerful tool for students to identify, understand, and express their emotions. The prompts below can and should be used for any emotion that a student wants to explore further through writing.

When introducing the prompt(s) with students, be mindful that not all students are in a place to write about how they are feeling today, and not all students can easily access or express their emotions through writing.

We encourage you to invite students to write about any emotion they are interested in and comfortable exploring; and to explore other mediums for expression as a starting point if helpful (drawing, talking, listening to music, etc.) All students should feel welcome to participate and bring their full selves to the page.

Suggested Session Timing and Activities:

Step 1: Welcome and Check-in

5-10 Minutes

Welcome participants, pass out name tags if they are gathering together for the first time, and begin with a check-in question to frame the session: "How are you feeling today?"

Decide how writers will respond to the question: they can freewrite, draw, share one word about how they're feeling in a circle, or write it on their name tag.

- If you begin with a freewrite or some drawing time, consider playing soft music to help young people feel comfortable in the space.
- You can use the feelings chart on page 1 of the [Explore Your Feelings–Handout](#) as a “menu” of feelings if helpful.

If this is the first time this group of young people are coming together, we also suggest spending some time talking about community guidelines, or what kinds of supportive behaviors they appreciate when working in a new group.

Share that they'll be writing to explore their emotions today, which can take a lot of courage and vulnerability: with ourselves, and with each other. Ask, “What do you need from the group today so that you can take risks in your writing?”

Participants can share ideas if they feel comfortable, or you can ask them to anonymously share their ideas on a post-it or index card, which you can collect, review, and summarize for the group. Feel free to add a few examples of your own, or ask them to agree or elaborate on ideas that others have shared, if time allows.

Step 2: Play Video

5 Minutes

Share with students that: “Mychal Threets is a librarian who uses his social media platforms as a way to spread ‘library joy.’ Mychal also uses his platforms as a way to promote the importance of mental health. One of the ways you can support your own mental health is by journaling and writing about your feelings. In his video, Mychal shares an exciting opportunity to share your writing and become a published author – let’s watch together.”

If A/V allows, play his video: [Write. Read. Feel. with Mychal Threets.](#)

After the video plays, ask for reflections or questions.

While the focus of this session is on students exploring the and sharing their emotions on the page, this is also a great time to share that libraries are filled with stories – the ones in the books around them and also in the people who come into the library. Each student has a story inside on themselves – so many, in fact! The ones they know and the ones they'll go on to discover and to create. They can engage in books not just as the readers but also as the writers of them.

At this point, it may be helpful to open and display links to previous 826 National student anthologies, found in the About The Project section of this guide, to make the publication

opportunity more tangible: “In addition to exploring your feelings through writing today, you have an opportunity to *share* your writing and could even become a published author!”

Step 3: Read Aloud

10 Minutes

Share your selected book or text to read aloud. See the list of suggested books for ideas, or choose your own favorite title that explores the power and possibilities of emotions.

If time allows, share one or more of the discussion questions. Feel free to reword for different age groups as necessary:

- What emotion(s) does the author explore?
- When we read, we can feel feelings along with the characters. How did you feel while you were listening to the story?
- In what ways does the author describe the emotion? Which of the 5 senses (see, hear, taste, touch, smell) do they use?
- In what ways did you connect to what the author shared? Did it remind you of a time in your life when you felt the same way? Can you think of another story that explores a similar feeling?

Step 4: Time to Write!

30-60 Minutes

Recommended Writing Prompts for Younger Writers (Grades K-5)

A) Explore Your Feelings

To start, pick an emotion you want to explore further through writing. It can be joy, or fear, or love, or anxiety, etc. Choose an emotion that you’d like to understand better.

Facilitator Note: *It may be helpful to do a group brainstorm of emotions first, or have writers spend one minute writing down a list of all of the emotions they’ve felt in the past week (or month, etc.). Then, have them choose one emotion from the list(s) you’ve generated.*

Once you have your emotion, begin your exploration by making 3-6 lists. Distribute the Explore Your Feelings—Handout for them to guide their writing, which includes a page for each list below:

1. Objects that bring you (chosen emotion)
2. Songs and/or sounds that bring you _____
3. People that bring you _____

4. Places that bring you _____
5. Colors that bring you _____
6. Words that bring you _____

From here, write a memory about one of the items on your lists to turn into a “small moment” memoir or a poem (recommended for students in grades 6-12), or write a repetition poem about the many ways this emotion shows up in your life (recommended for grades K-5). See the Explore Your Feelings—Handout for an optional poem template.

Facilitator Note: *If you are working with younger writers, we recommend modeling how to turn the ideas in your lists into a repetition poem—or, create a collaborative list poem together first, before they start their own!*

B) What’s Your Happy?

We can find joy in so many places. Think and write about what makes you happiest. Start with people and things, but be sure to also think about sounds, smells and tastes that fill you with joy: maybe joy sounds like your cousin’s laugh. Or looks like your dog’s ears. Or smells like the pages of your favorite book.

To explore our “happys”, start by distributing the [What’s Your Happy?—Handout](#) and reading the introduction poem out loud. Then, share what makes you happy. Begin with people and things that make you happy, but be sure to also share the sounds, smells, and tastes that fill you with joy. Share that “we can become happy, and find happiness, using all of our five senses.”

Then, have participants work on the first page of the handout to think about all the ways that happiness finds them. When they finish, they will write a poem that describes their “happys.”

Facilitator Note: *There is an optional poem template on page 2 of the handout, which is a wonderful choice for young people who are looking for a clear structure to start their poem. They can also write their own poem or reflection about the different things that fill them with joy.*

If they choose the poem template, encourage young writers to mix up lines and add details to their poem to make it their own – these are two “moves” that poets do all the time to make their writing even stronger!

Recommended Writing Prompts for Older Writers (Grades 6-12)

A) Explore Your Feelings

To start, pick an emotion you want to explore further through writing. It can be joy, or fear, or love, or anxiety, etc. Choose an emotion that you'd like to understand better.

Facilitator Note: *It could be helpful to do a group brainstorm of emotions first, or have students spend one minute all of the emotions they've felt in the past week. Then, have them choose one emotion from the list(s) you've generated.*

Once you have your emotion, begin your exploration by making 3-6 lists. Distribute the Explore Your Feelings—Handout for them to guide their writing, which includes a page for each list below:

7. Objects that bring you (chosen emotion)
8. Songs and/or sounds that bring you _____
9. People that bring you _____
10. Places that bring you _____
11. Colors that bring you _____
12. Words that bring you _____

From here, write a memory about one of the items on your lists to turn into a “small moment” memoir or a poem (recommended for students in grades 6-12), or write a repetition poem about the many ways this emotion shows up in your life (recommended for grades K-5). See the Explore Your Feelings—Handout for an optional poem template.

Facilitator Note: *If you are working with younger writers, we recommend modeling how to turn your ideas in your lists into a repetition poem—or, create a collaborative list poem together first, before they start their own!*

C) Mine Your Memories

How are emotions and memories connected? In this prompt, you'll pick an emotion that you'd like to write about, and reflect on times in your life when you felt that emotion most clearly.

Facilitator Note: *It may be helpful to do a group brainstorm of emotions first, or have writers spend one minute writing down a list of all of the emotions they've felt in the past week (or month, etc.). Then, have them choose one emotion from the list(s) you've generated.*

To start, make a memory line: draw a horizontal line across a blank page of paper (landscape or hotdog-style works best here). Make a star on the left end of the line. That will be the earliest, joyful (or your chosen emotion) memory you can think of. Jot down 2-3 words about that memory for now—they'll be time to write more about your memories later.

Facilitator Note: *Make your own memory line along with participants! It's helpful for visual learners to see the completed steps as they make their own memory line, and it helps to build community.*

Next, make a star on the right hand side of the line. That will be your most recent joyful (or other chosen emotion) memory...from today? Yesterday? This past weekend? Next, fill the line with 3-5 other points, at least. If you get stuck, try the prompts below to get you thinking about different types of memories—your chosen emotion should be central to each type of memory you include.

1. A big, meaningful memory
2. A small memory that's stuck with you
3. An outdoor memory
4. An inside memory
5. Something someone said to you that filled you with (chosen emotion)
6. A loud memory
7. A quiet, solo, or private memory
8. A memory shared with someone special

Now, think about the patterns and connections that you can make across these memories (for example, who are they with? Where are they? What are you doing?). Try to identify 2-3 patterns, at least, and jot those patterns down on the margins of your memory line paper.

Now, write a reflection or a poem about how this emotion shows up in your life. In your poem, try to include as many of these connections as possible.

Or, you can choose to focus on just one of these memories and write about it. Try to bring yourself back to that time and place, and write as if you were living the memory, today. What sounds, sights, tastes, smells, and feelings are present?

D) Unexpected Joys

Joy can show up in the most unexpected times and places. With this prompt, you will write about a time when joy surprised you, or where you found joy in something uncommonly viewed as joyful.

To start thinking about unexpected joy, first take 3 minutes and write down all of the obvious, expected, even cliché joys you can think of. Consider: food, objects, things from nature, etc. that you and MANY other people find joyful.

Then, brainstorm the unexpected joys that show up in your life. Maybe it's the crack in your bedroom ceiling that reminds you of a banana, or the way your grandma's glasses steam up when she drinks her coffee, or the sound of nails on a chalkboard, etc. Try to incorporate as much specific, sensory language as possible in your brainstorm.

Finally, choose one or more of these unexpected joys, and write about it. Why is this joy important to you? What insights can you make—about who you are, your values, your hopes—from this unexpected joy? How will you make room for unexpected joys in the future? What kinds of joy await you?

Facilitator Note: *Unexpected joy can be an abstract concept, and some students may have a hard time generating ideas. It may be helpful to have them start by thinking about things that made them laugh, or smile, today – which of those joys were unusual or surprising, if any? Or, they could think about people in their life, and reflect on times they shared unexpected moments of joy with those people.*

Facilitator Note: Encouraging Revision

By the end of this session, the goal is for most participants to have a solid start of a first draft. While this session does not include dedicated time for revision and editing, there are many ways to encourage young writers to revise their piece – an especially important step if they are interested in submitting their work!

A few ideas for revision:

- If time allows, students can start on the Revision BINGO cards for [narratives](#) or [poetry](#).
- Share the BINGO cards with students at the end of the session and encourage them to revise their work at home.
- If the group meets regularly, plan another session or time for them to participate in peer review and revision.

Step 5: Reflection & Closing

10 Minutes

If time allows, invite participants who feel comfortable to share part of their writing: they can choose to share a paragraph, their favorite line, or their favorite word. If a student is not ready to share, that's OK – thank them for writing something new today!

Then, close in the same way you began: by asking students to reflect on how they are feeling. Ask: How are you feeling now, after writing about your feelings? They can write this answer on the same post-it they shared at the beginning, or share this with the group.

Finally, thank students for showing up, for reflecting on their feelings, and for writing something personal. And, encourage them to submit their writing for a chance to become published authors! See the submission guidelines below.

Whether or not they choose to submit their piece, we hope they continue to use writing as a way to tap into their feelings!

Submission Guidelines

826 National wants to publish the next generation of writers—that means the young people in YOUR community and/or school! Students, families, and educators/librarians can submit writing from this session to 826 National for an opportunity to become a published author!

Selected young authors will receive two free copies of the book, to be published and mailed in June 2025. **Submissions are open now through November 15, 2024!**

How to Submit:

Students and families, submit your work using the links below:

- [Students and families submission form](#) – English
- [Formulario de presentación de antología de escritos de estudiantes 2024-2025 de 826 National: ESTUDIANTES Y FAMILIAS](#) – Spanish

Educators and librarians, submit work from multiple young people using the link below:

- [Educator submission form](#)

Note: We encourage young people to write in their home language, and we welcome submissions in any language. If it is possible to include English translations with your original piece, they are welcome but not required.